



Inside Congress

by United States Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.

For the week ending May 24, 2002

Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

HONORING VETERANS AT THE NORMANDY AMERICAN CEMETERY

For Memorial Day, I will be speaking and laying a wreath on behalf of Washington state veterans at the American Cemetery in Normandy, France, the site of the D-Day invasion in 1944. I will post the text of my speech on my website, www.house.gov/nethercutt, after the ceremony.

RATHRDRUM PRAIRIE BILL CLEARS COMMITTEE HURDLE

This week the Resources Committee passed legislation I introduced with Idaho Rep. C.L. "Butch" Otter to authorize a study on the Rathdrum Prairie-Spokane Valley Aquifer. This study will enable us to balance good environmental stewardship with the need to bring more jobs to the Spokane area.

The bill authorizes \$3.5 million for the Department of Interior to study the Rathdrum Prairie-Spokane Valley aquifer and develop a comprehensive computer model that will provide a scientifically defensible understanding of regional aquifer in both states. The bill stipulates that the study must be completed within three years of the bill's enactment.

Spokane and Kootenai Counties manage the aquifer very differently, in part because the limited - and sometimes conflicting - data on the aquifer can be interpreted in many ways. A study would provide data for the entities to reach a common understanding, seen by many as key to protecting the drinking water of thousands in the Inland Northwest, as well as making sure that jobs aren't lost due to a 10-year wait for water rights.

This study will help us create a win-win situation for the environment and the economy of Eastern Washington.

SPOKANE READINESS TRAINING CENTER TO RECEIVE \$8.8 MILLION

The Spokane Readiness Training Center is one step closer to becoming a reality. Phase I of the center is slated to receive \$8.8 million as part of the Fiscal Year 2003 Defense Authorization Act (**H.R. 4546**) recently passed by the House of Representatives. This facility has been a top priority in my requests for local defense funding, so I am pleased to see this project is on its way to becoming a reality now.

The facility will serve as the community-based training center to meet the combined needs of the Washington Army National Guard, and the Spokane area fire and police departments. The center includes administrative and training space, distance learning classrooms and a small arms range.

The mission of the Readiness Training Center is important for ensuring the security and protection of those of us who call Washington State home. Since Sept. 11, we all recognize the need for a centralized training center, which will link federal, state and local resources in the preparation, training and execution of federal and local emergency response missions.

This move is really good for both the airport and the Guard. The Guard has outgrown its space at the airport, and the airport can attract new businesses in the space vacated by the Guard. This project can bring great benefits to our region: security and economic growth.

LEGISLATION

This week I became a cosponsor of **H.R. 3337**, the Reservists Pay Security Act, introduced by Rep. Wexler of Florida. The bill makes sure that federal employees called up to Reserve duty do not incur a pay cut. Costs to the government would be negligible. The legislation does, however, reduce hardships on families, maintain support for the Reserve and National Guard, and allow individuals to pay their monthly bills. In addition, many state and local government and private companies are already doing this. It makes sense for our nation's largest employer to do the same.

I also became a cosponsor of **H.R. 1274**, introduced by Rep. Hunter of California. This bill would treat tips to service employees as gifts, allowing the first \$10,000 to be tax-free. This would put hundreds of dollars per month back in the pockets of those who need it most: low-income, hard-working individuals. It would also benefit employers by reducing the heavy burden involved in tracking, reporting, and - in some cases - collecting monies from their employees to satisfy IRS regulations.

ON THE FLOOR

Here is a recap of the legislative activity for the week:

H.R. 4626, Encouraging Work and Supporting Marriage Act of 2002. The bill passed by a vote of 409-1. I voted yes.

The bill accelerates the marriage tax penalty relief in the standard deduction and modifies the work opportunity credit and the welfare-to-work credit.

H.R. 4015, Jobs for Veterans Act. The bill passed by a vote of 409-0. I voted yes.

This bill provides priority of service to veterans and spouses of certain veterans for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services in any job training program directly funded, in whole or in part by the Department of Labor. The bill contains a number of provisions to enable veterans to successfully find employment.

H.R. 3717, Federal Deposit Insurance Reform Act of 2002. The bill passed by a vote of 408-18. I voted yes.

This legislation increases the amount of coverage for an individual account to \$130,000 from \$100,000. It indexes future coverage limits to inflation and doubles coverage limits for certain types of IRAs and 401(k)s. This legislation is important to the savings and retirement security of all Americans.

H.R. 3448, Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Response Act of 2002 Conference Report. The bill passed by a vote of 425-1. I voted yes.

This legislation merges the House and Senate versions into one bill with the goal of better preparing America for bioterrorist threats or other public health emergencies by improving America's ability to respond effectively and quickly to such threats. This sweeping legislation covers everything from public health preparedness and improvements, to enhancing controls on deadly biological agents, to protecting our food, drug and drinking water supplies. In addition, the Conference Report reauthorizes the Prescription Drug User Fee Act for five years, which allows the pharmaceutical industry to pay the Food and Drug Administration to review industry products more quickly.

H.R. 3129, Customs Border Security Act of 2001. The bill passed by a vote of 327-101. I voted yes.

H.R. 3129 authorizes appropriations for FYs 2002 and 2003 for the U.S. Customs Service, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and the International Trade Commission. The authorization for the Customs Service includes funds for salaries and expenses, its Automated Commercial Environment (ACE) computer system, air and marine interdiction, and a program to prevent child pornography.

HR 4775, Supplemental Appropriations Act for 2002. The bill passed by a vote of 280-128. I voted yes.

At 3 AM on Friday, May 24, the House completed consideration of the Fiscal Year 2002 Supplemental Appropriations Act, **H.R. 4775**.

The bill provides urgently needed funding for the war on terrorism, including \$15.7 billion for the Department of Defense, fully funding operational costs, personnel costs, munitions, intelligence activities, and coalition support. The legislation funds the costs of mobilization, including National Guard and Reserve call-ups, training, spare parts and maintenance, and the acceleration of the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles (such as those stored in Umatilla, Oregon). Significant funding for the new Transportation Security Administration is provided, including \$1.5 billion for the purchase and installation of checked baggage explosive detection systems. An additional \$112 million is provided for the FBI to investigate and thwart future terrorist attacks, and \$75 million is allocated to enable the Immigration and Naturalization Service to correct deficiencies in tracking immigration violations. New York City reconstruction and community support assistance is funded at \$5.5 billion. Unanticipated enrollment in the veterans healthcare system required the \$417 million the bill provides for veterans medical care. \$1 billion is included for shortfalls in the Pell Grant program to ensure that all eligible students will receive necessary assistance. Finally, the bill includes important foreign assistance to support reconstruction in Afghanistan, Pakistan and to aid the Independent States of the Former Soviet Union that supported our efforts in Afghanistan. A comprehensive summary of this bill, as reported out of Committee, is posted here:
www.house.gov/appropriations/news/107_2/03supfull.htm

It is my hope that the Senate will act expeditiously on this urgently needed funding bill as soon as the Memorial Day recess concludes. Continued delay on this measure would not be in the best interests of our country.

SCHEDULE

Last weekend I was in Spokane where I participated in Lilac Parade. Camp Fire Girls Teresa Kness, Jamie Harper and Paige Salvetti rode in the parade with me. I led the judging of my Students Taking Action and Responsibility (STAR) essay contest and was proud to present Jamie Fletcher of Veradale and Tamara Power-Drutis of Cheney with the first place prizes in each category. After attending a meeting in the Tri-Cities, I attended Whitman College's graduation ceremony in Walla Walla to watch our friend Elizabeth Johnson graduate with honors.

I spoke at the Valley Rotary Sunrise Club and then spoke at Valley Christian School. I participated in a press conference with GenPrime as they donated a new product to the Spokane Fire Department to help determine whether unknown substances are of high bacteria content.

I met with Lucas Peck at my office. I also met with Jim DeWalt, Todd Mielke and Tracy Duncan of Associated Builders and Contractors.

Tuesday morning I spoke at a briefing by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation on advanced technologies for managing diabetes. I met with Linda Garrelt of Jones Pharmacy, Holly Whitcomb Henry and Mike Henry of Seattle, and Rod Schafer of the Washington State Pharmacists Association to discuss health care issues. I spoke with WSU President Lane Rawlins by telephone. I met with Steve Wright of the Bonneville Power Administration to discuss its future. I attended a briefing by former President Jimmy Carter to a group of congressmen and senators regarding his recent visit to Cuba.

In the Science Committee, of which I am a member, we passed several pieces of legislation regarding funding for the National Science Foundation, grant assistance for math and science undergraduate education, a flood warning system, a new building safety inspection team, and enterprise integration. I met with Paul Houghland, president of the National Hardwood Lumber Association. I met with Fred Aronow, a civilian ambassador for Washington State to the Department of the Army at the Pentagon. I presided over floor proceedings in the House as Speaker Pro Tempore Wednesday afternoon. I met with Don Brunell and Gary Chandler of the Association of Washington Business.

I spoke with Mike McCabe of Pew Trusts Salmon Assessment regarding salmon restoration in the Columbia River Basin. I met with Ed King and Tim Smith with Walgreens. I met with Trisha Bennett of Shearer Lumber Products regarding the Canadian softwood lumber agreement.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week:

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